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FOR ENGLISH LITERATURE

WILLIAM MORRIS

BY JANE LEGGETT

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# WILLIAM MORRIS, MASTER OF MANY CRAFTS.

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# WILLIAM MORRIS MASTER OF MANY CRAFTS. A STUDY.

BY

JAMES LEATHAM.

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## *NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION.*

THE following pages were written shortly after Morris's death and before the "Life" of him by Mr Mackail appeared. Had the author written now instead of six years ago he would have had both less and more to say upon certain matters than is here said; but in essential particulars the little book still represents his views, and is republished without notable alteration.

Morris touched life at so many points that any notice of his work must also be many-sided; and it is hoped the glance at

some of his activities here will not be found too hasty or cursory.

In a time of political reaction and self-seeking megalomania it is pleasant to find that the Morris cult, which is progressive and seeks its gratification in the making of life humane and beautiful for others, should wax rather than wane. Morris's work has found a steadily increasing body of admirers and imitators. He has taught the teachers of the public, and although those who receive the lesson do not in most cases know of him to whose influence they respond, that is a less matter than that they should get the lesson and respond to the influence.

PETERHEAD, April, 1903.

# William Morris, Master of Many Crafts.

## I.

BY the death of William Morris, in 1896, Civilization lost one of her truest friends, Art one of her most devoted servants, and the "world of men and life" one of its most versatile and original personalities. Poet, prose-writer, designer, art-craftsman, and Socialist, "he touched nothing that he did not adorn" and advance. Few men have won even in one department the success he achieved in all the great branches of the world's work to which he set his hand. If ever man

had reason to rest and be satisfied with the work he had done and the position he enjoyed, that man was William Morris any time within the last twenty years of his life. If ever man gave flat and circumstantial contradiction to the theory that the Socialist movement is a Cave of Adullam, attracting only the distressed, the indebted, the failures of society, that man was William Morris all his life through. There have been many such; but he, surely, was a pre-eminent example of this. Discontented, indeed, he was, but only because, seeing what life was, he vividly felt and knew how much better and more beautiful it might be. And he entered the Socialist movement because he had enough simplicity of mind to believe that "evil was not made to last," and enough bravery and social sympathy to help in its undoing. If the artistic temperament is naturally sensuous; if beautiful surroundings and attractive associates are so much more to the artist than they are to other men,

then, surely, all the greater is Morris's glory in that he voluntarily gave up, during much of his time, the surroundings to which, by taste and training, he was most allied, and spent so many of his days and nights with the poor and unlettered, at street-corner meetings and in dingy "upper chambers." Doubtless he was "realising" himself in making his protest against the ugliness and cruelty of a system which galled and fretted his humane and artistic temperament at every turn. He could not choose but rebel and protest; but it is his exceeding great distinction that he, unlike so many of the friends of Art who talk of "Philistinism," was willing to fight what he regarded as the enemy with their own political weapons; was willing, in his manly, single-minded, full-blooded way, to bear his share in the rough work of propaganda and organization. Certainly his protest was, in the result, a protest made on behalf of others. Had his motives been self-regarding in

any fair sense of the epithet he would have sung his songs in peace, and enjoyed the work of his hands and brain come day go day. But it was part of the make-up of Morris that he was not only a genius, but had in him the qualities of a hero and a fighter as well. Full of all knightly qualities as he was, the modern equivalent of the warfare waged by his classic and mediæval heroes was the warfare against greed and craft and muddling vandalism, strongly entrenched in the fact of possession and in the ignorance and subserviency of the people. On account equally of the rare pagan serenity and self-sufficiency of his character and the unique value of his work, his memory must be a lifelong inspiration to all who have known him and felt the spell of his influence.

I have undertaken to say somewhat of the life and work of William Morris, and, although I do not pretend to give here anything of the nature of a biography, must sooner or later descend to details

and circumstances. But some of us have known him so well; he has filled so much of our intellectual horizon; we have followed his career with so much interest; we have read so eagerly anything and everything said or written by him or about him—that we have a difficulty in quite realising that there are thousands of intelligent persons who do not know the outstanding achievements of his life of sixty-two years. With the blow of his death still fresh upon us after the lapse of many months, the only natural things to do seem to be to praise him and mourn him, to praise him and mourn him again. Mere circumstantial detail appears formal and unnecessary—trivialities spoken by a still open grave.

One cannot help remembering Morris's dread of death. Not the last physical struggle itself, still less the dread of anything that might lie beyond, but the agony of parting from all the loves and joys of a life full of the sweet and the bitter sweet of being and doing. In his

writings, both prose and verse, the hateful inevitableness of death is an ever-recurring theme. It comes athwart the stir and bustle of "John Ball." One of the reasons given by Morris for cultivating art is that by so doing we may forget and belittle death. In the story of "Jason" the song put into the mouth of Orpheus begins: "O Death, that maketh Life so sweet." It was to evade death that the wanderers in "The Earthly Paradise" left their Norwegian home; but the earthly paradise was not found, and in the Prologue the poet tells us in advance that he "cannot make quick-coming death a little thing." In one of his later prose writings, however, he has taught us to regard the dead, as such, with a sane and healthy indifference. Looking upon the bodies of comrades slain in battle, he makes John Ball ask of the scholar from another age:—

"What sayest thou, scholar? Feelest thou sorrow of heart when thou lookest on this, either for the man himself or for thyself and the time when thou shalt be as he is?"

And the scholar answers :—

"Nay, I feel no sorrow for this ; for the man is not here ; this is an empty house, and the man has gone from it. Forsooth, this is to me but as a waxen image of a man ; nay, not even that, for if it were an image it would be an image of the man as he was when he was alive. But here is no life nor semblance of life, and I am not moved by it ; nay, I am more moved by the man's clothes and war-gear ; there is more life in them than in him."

This, I am satisfied, is the right attitude towards the clay of the dead, and it represents the view which is steadily gaining ground, as the growth of the practice of cremation bears witness. If the living body and the spirit which it encloses or produces be treated with respect we can afford to dispense with exaggerated care for the lifeless, tenantless shell. The highest reverence we can pay to the great and worthy dead is to remember the only enduring part of them—their words and works, the good they have done and left behind them—emulating their lives and bearing a hand in the work they did if that be still necessary. In the light of

this view, let us take a glance at somewhat of what Morris has left behind him; what he has done to better the world and make his name worth preserving.

William Morris was born at Walthamstow in 1834. He was the eldest son of a prosperous merchant of Welsh extraction, who died in the prime of life in 1844, leaving his widow and family in comparative affluence. Morris was educated at Forest Gate School, Walthamstow, at Marlborough, and at Exeter College, Oxford, where he made the acquaintance of Edward Burne-Jones and Charles Joseph Faulkner, who both remained his lifelong intimate friends, and were his associates in many a worthy enterprise. Faulkner was an active partner in the concern of Morris & Co. during the first thirteen years of its existence; while Burne-Jones illustrated Morris's books, designed some of his tapestries and window-pieces, and, like Faulkner, was one of the original partners in the under-

taking which has done so much to raise the standard of taste in house decoration within the last thirty years.

Morris's undergraduate days were not distinguished by anything specially notable. He had already begun the study and cultivation of poetry, antiquities, and art; but there was nothing of the crank or the *dilettante* about him. Unlike certain other poets, he did not get into trouble with dons and proctors; he kept out of debt; he never was in any danger of being "sent down" for irregularities of any kind. At Marlborough he did much sturdy hitting in the cricket field, and in an article—"William Morris, M.A."—evidently written by a friend—which appeared long ago in the *University Magazine*, he is described as a boy who was "fond of a lark all round." At Oxford neither the regular studies of the Arts course nor the pursuit of his own special hobbies prevented his becoming a good oarsman.

Taking his degree in due course, Morris left Oxford to enter the service

of Mr George Edmund Street, the architect, with whom he remained as an articled pupil for some two years. But no one calling was to claim Morris for its own. It has well been said of him that he combined six giants in one personality. From the production, on paper, of the law-courts which were Mr Street's specialty in architecture, he turned to poetry.

## II.—MORRIS'S POETRY.

### "GUENEVERE."

MORRIS was but twenty-four when he published his first book, "The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems." "Galahad, a Christmas Mystery," had been published for him by Messrs. Bell & Daldy a few months earlier in the same year; but that poem formed a brochure rather than a book, and was embodied in the later volume. Some few critics have referred to this collection of verse as representing Morris's high-water mark of poetic excellence. In point of fact, the young singer was only trying his pinions in these short poems. Fine as

they are, they form but the prelude to the more ambitious flight which his muse took in "The Life and Death of Jason" and "The Earthly Paradise." "The Defence of Guenevere" and the poems published along with it are entirely mediæval in spirit; though in point of time they belong to that dim earlier period which we speak of as Arthurian. "The Life and Death of Jason" is, of course, Greek. "The Earthly Paradise" is a collection of tales partly mediæval, partly classical, with excursions into Norse and Icelandic saga. It is difficult to understand why any one should hesitate about giving by far and away the highest place to the latter work among the poetry of William Morris. What Macaulay said of Boswell's "Johnson" as compared with other biographies might almost be said of "The Earthly Paradise" relatively to Morris's other poems: "Eclipse is first and the rest nowhere."

"The Defence of Guenevere" deals with the love of King Arthur's queen for

the knightly Sir Launcelot, her defence being spoken by herself to the assembled knights of the Round Table. This feature in the machinery of the poem seems unnatural: it is difficult to conceive of a lover describing the growth and causes of her passion to a company, of the other sex especially. Her pleading is, in form, not so much a "defence" as an explanation of how she and Launcelot came to love. On the one side is the husband Arthur, "with his great name and little love," busy with the affairs of court and camp, and, as would appear from the Queen's tale, negligent of his wife. On the other is Launcelot, bravest of all the Round Table knights, bearing all before him in battle and the tilt-yard, majestic in mien and stature, a "gracious smile" lighting his face, his speech consisting of "wonderful words that all mean verily the thing they seem to mean." Guenevere can tell her knight "among helmed men" by his "long, strong arms and sway like

an angel's in your saddle there." To her he is

more fair
Than aspens in the autumn at their best.

He fills all lands with his great fame, she says—

So that Breuse, even, as he rode feared lest
At turning of the way your shield should flame.

"And every morn," she says—

I scarce could pray at all,
For Launcelot's red golden hair would play
Instead of sunlight on the painted wall,
Mingled with dreams of what the priest did say.

Most people will see the moral of the tale in the words spoken to the saintly young Sir Galahad as he puts in his first vigil in church after setting out on the quest of the Sangreal. The "boy knight" has been musing regretfully on the life of love and war and chivalry he has left behind him; and, recalling the love passages he has witnessed between Launcelot and the Queen and between

Tristram and Iseult, he despairs of his ability to remain true to the condition of celibate purity required of him who would see the Holy Grail :—

With sleeply face bent to the chapel floor,
  Kept musing half asleep, till suddenly
A sharp bell rang from close beside the door,
  And I leapt up, when something passed me by,

Shrill ringing going with it, still half blind
  I staggered after; a great sense of awe
At every step kept gathering on my mind;
  Thereat I have no marvel, for I saw

One sitting on the altar as a throne,
  Whose face no man could say he did not know,
And though the bell still rang He sat alone,
  With raiment half blood-red, half white as snow.

Right so I fell upon the floor and knelt,
  Not as one kneels in church when mass is said,
But in a heap quite nerveless, for I felt
  The first time what a thing was perfect dread.

But mightily the gentle voice came down:
  "Rise up, and look and listen, Galahad,
Good knight of God, for you will see no frown
  Upon my face; I come to make you glad.

"For that you say that you are all alone,
I will be with you always; and fear not
You are uncared for, though no maiden moan
Above your empty tomb. For Launcelot,

"He in good time shall be my servant too.
Meantime take note whose sword first made him knight,
And who has loved him alway, yea, and who
Still trusts him alway, though in all men's sight

"He is just what you know, O Galahad.
This love is happy even as you say,
But would you for a little time be glad
To make ME sorry long day after day?

"Her warm arms round his neck half-throttle Me,
The hot love-tears burn deep like spots of lead,
Yea, and the years pass quick: right dismally
Will Launcelot at one time hang his head;

"Yea, old and shrivelled he shall win My love?"

"The Defence of Guenevere," be it remembered, is a dramatic poem—that is to say, one in which the personages tell their own story and reveal their own characters—and thus, Guenevere, reclin-

ing in prostrate penitence on the grave of Arthur; Galahad out on the quest for the Holy Cup; and the condemnation, by all the speakers in the poem, of conjugal disloyalty, are all in accordance with the ethics and outlook of the time. The conventional critic is not claiming too much when he appropriates the upshot of the "Defence of Guenevere" as being on the side of the sexual proprieties. But it is one of the advantages of a great work of art that it has usually a choice of "morals," and there will be many who will regard Guenevere's story as a veritable defence, who will hold that Guenevere, when she shows that she could not love Arthur nor help loving Launcelot, has the best of the argument. Neither the personages in the poem nor the conventional critic appear to recognise that, if morality has anything whatever to do with the relationship of the sexes, the really immoral connection was that loveless cohabitation between Arthur, with his "little love," and Guenevere, with

her no love at all. Mrs Grundy and her literary champions are slow to recognise that loveless matrimony—the *mariage de convenance* of high life and of royalties in particular—is simply legalised and socially-sanctioned prostitution. Morris was too true an artist to interpolate nineteenth century ethics into a mediæval story; but that he had decided views of his own regarding "the irrational knot" is shown by the way in which, in the prose tale "News from Nowhere," he causes Dick Hammond and Clara to separate from one another when Clara falls in love, or fancies she does, with another man, and how she some time after returns to her first and only love when she finds, after all, that her liking for the other man was only a mental freak, a temporary infatuation.

This is certainly a bold bluffing of the institution of marriage, and in spite of the altered conditions assumed by Morris in the communistic society he is describing, there will be many who will dissent

very strongly from such a free-and-easy view of the relation of the sexes. The relation of the sexes is in itself rather a social arrangement than a question of morals, and is to be discussed from the point of view of social results, as, for instance, the degradation of woman under polygamy. Morris argues that in the coming time female beauty will not be so fleeting, leaving us to imply that if a man and a woman separated after having lived together for a time, the woman would not be so spoiled in looks as to have no chance of finding another worthy mate. And as the society of the future will, he argues, be communistic, the financial difficulty and the support and care of the children would no longer complicate the question of separation as they do to-day. After due allowance has been made for all this, and accepting the large assumptions implied in it, a good many troublesome considerations still remain. What is quite clear is that among men there is a good deal

of mere animal lust from which women are comparatively free, and that under the freer conditions indicated by Morris many men would simply rove around indiscriminately. If women would have no actual material hardship to bear, they would at least have many an hour of bitter feeling arising from the consciousness of slighted affection and violated pledges on the part of man. The spectacle of the often-widowed woman of the future laying out her charms to catch yet another husband is not an attractive one if we try to conceive it, and one is appalled at the thought of how much time would be wasted in oglings, flirtations, and all the pleasant sillinesses which are tolerable to outsiders only because, as a rule, they are over and done with before the parties reach years of maturity. Absolute freedom in sexual relations would give the rake unlimited scope, and would almost certainly increase the numbers of this class. Now, the rake is usually a stupid and useless animal,

whose amours interfere with the serious business of life, and men do not thoroughly settle down to the duties of good citizenship until, as the Scotswoman said on the night of her marriage, their "love's at an end."* All the appetites are given to us in excess, and perhaps the difficulties and risks with which promiscuous gratification is attended, and the more or less enforced fidelity to one partner, act as a wholesome check on excessive indulgence. There are, however, so many drawbacks to the rigid marriage law of Western Europe that it is not surprising if attacks should frequently be made on it from the best of motives; and what has here been said is the less of a digression since the question of the relation of the sexes is raised in many of Morris's writings both in prose and verse. In "News from Nowhere"

* "Thank God," said she to her husband when they had retired to their home at the close of the wedding ceremony, "Thank God, John; oor love's at an end."

and "Socialism, its Growth and Outcome" (the latter written in collaboration with E. Belfort Bax) he has plainly declared for a freer relationship of the sexes. Divorce courts were to him "lunatic affairs" as seen from the point of view of coming centuries. In "News from Nowhere" he says :—

> Property quarrels being no longer possible, what remains in these matters that a court could deal with? Fancy a court for enforcing a contract of passion or sentiment! If such a thing were needed as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the enforcement of contract, such a folly would do that for us.

If Morris held these opinions at the time he wrote *Guenevere*, his fine voicing of the ordinary view of the sacredness of matrimony and the sin of illicit love is one more indication among many of how the artist got above the social philosopher.

Even after all due allowance has been made for the intellectual laziness of the British public, one learns with surprise that the bulk of the first edition of this poem lay on the publishers' shelves for

some time as unsaleable, and was finally sent to the mill as waste paper.

### "JASON."

Morris's next adventure in the realm of poesy was "The Life and Death of Jason," which appeared in 1869. It relates how the godlike Jason, son of the dethroned king Æson, sets out in the good ship Argo to win the far-famed Golden Fleece. The poet, in true Homeric fashion, gives a picturesque catalogue of all the heroes and other celebrities who accompanied Jason on the quest of the Fleece. Hercules, his twelve labours accomplished, is there; so also is Atalanta the swift-footed; Orpheus is bard and harper to the seafarers, and his songs form some of the finest poetry in the book; there were the twin brothers Castor and Pollux; the fair-haired Meleager; Euphemus "who had power to go dryshod across the plain no man doth sow"; there was Laocoon, "no

longer young" ; with Zetes and Calaïs, sons of Boreas. Asclepius was surgeon to the ship's company, which included also the "wise far-seeing Nestor," Laertes from "Ithaca the hot," and Almenus, son of Mars by a mortal maid. Each of these personages is introduced with fitting pomp and circumstance, and by the end of the voyage, from being the pale myths of Lempriére and the text-book, they become living and breathing fellow-mortals. It is, indeed, one of the most characteristic features of the poem that it seems to bring the whole mythological world to life again. On our way to Colchis, the city where the Golden Fleece is jealously guarded by Phineus and his wonder-working daughter Medea, we pass with the Argonauts breathlessly through the blue Semplegades, or clashing cliffs, which meet with terrific noise and churning up of foam and spray just before the Argo attempts the passage, then open to allow her to pass, and,

after she has won her way, again meet with a fearful concussion. When Colchis is reached, and the voyagers have been received with fair words by the false king Phineus, Jason enters upon the series of tasks which have to be performed ere he can possess the coveted prize. He has first to yoke a pair of ferocious brazen bulls whose necks have never worn harness, and, while they belch forth steam and flame upon him, compel them to plough a single furrow in the field of Mars. In this furrow, if he succeed so far, he has to sow dragons' teeth for seed, from which immediately springs up a crop of armed men bent upon his destruction. If he escape death at the hands of the Earthborn, he has finally to cross a chamber guarded by a huge, ever-wakeful, and cunning dragon, and win the Fleece from an inner chamber. By the help of the sorceress Medea, the king's daughter, who has fallen in love with the fair-haired hero, he surmounts all difficulties, and finally

bears away the Fleece and Medea as well. After many adventures by sea and land, Jason returns to Greece by way of the Mediterranean, passing the Garden of Hesperides, Circe's fatal bower, and the gulf haunted by the sirens, whose singing tempts Butës, one of the Argonauts, to leap over the side of the ship to reach those enchantresses. When the Argo arrives at Iolchos, Pelias, the usurper of Æson's throne, is slain by the devices of Medea, and Jason becomes king, along with Creon. After ten years of great felicity with Medea, who has borne him two sons, he falls in love with Glauce, daughter of Creon. The law allows two wives; but Medea will suffer no divided allegiance. She revenges herself on Jason by slaying their children and destroying Glauce on the morning on which Glauce and Jason were to have been married. Medea flies from Iolchos, and some time after Jason is killed by the stempost of the Argo, which strangely fall to pieces on the shore while Jason

lies asleep there, the heavy beam crushing him to death.

The whole poem, considered as a work of art, is noble in the extreme. With its full, sonorous swing and rhythm, its wealth of picturesque detail, and its leisurely yet spirited description of scenery and incidents, it is as different as possible from "The Defence of Guenevere," which is marred by abrupt changes in the machinery, a lack of fulness and clearness in the narrative, and extremely careless punctuation. The style of "Jason" and "The Earthly Paradise" is perhaps open to the objection that the linked sweetness is occasionally too long drawn out, while purists may take exception to the scansion of words such as "desire," which Morris uniformly treats as if it were a word of three syllables instead of two only. But these—and especially the latter—are the merest specks on the sun. Such poems as "Jason," "The Lovers of Gudrun" (in "The Earthly Paradise"), and "The

Story of Sigurd the Volsung" have all the human interest of the best modern prose fiction, with the added charms of ordered tunefulness of expression, minute and felicitous description, and a knowledge of, and sympathy with, the life of other times and peoples to which I know of no parallel in literature. This is not the unmeasured rhapsody of a hero-worshipper, but the discriminating praise of one who by close personal contact has had an opportunity of in some measure realising Morris's intimate knowledge of the everyday life—the customs, dress, and methods of work—of classic and mediæval peoples. In this kind of lore he struck one as being possessed of more knowledge than even the average antiquarian specialist, which might well be, considering how much he exceeded the ordinary antiquary in the important matter of imaginative sympathy.

With "The Earthly Paradise," with "Sigurd the Volsung," with "Pharamond," and Morris's translations of

Homer and Virgil I shall not attempt to deal. No amount of writing descriptive of an author's style conveys even a reasonably adequate conception of it. The distinction between one style and another, whether in prose or verse, is so subtle that when a general encomium has been expressed, all that remains is for the reader to go to the author and read and learn for himself. This is especially true of great writers. Of a small or an average man we may say that his style is Macaulayan or Carlylean, Emersonian or Arnoldian; that it is in the manner of Lamb, or Defoe, or De Quincey; or that it is a composite of two or more of these. But while we can thus place styles in a category, how shall we describe the category itself? What Morris's poetical manner is like I have tried to indicate in speaking of the style of "Jason"; it only remains to indicate what it is *not* like. In these poems you will find few or none of the polished epigrams of Tennyson, little of the lip-

labour and word-passion of Swinburne, still less of the didactic moralising of Wordsworth, Arnold, or Browning. Morris is neither cynically witty after the manner of Heine or Clough, nor humorous with the humour of Hood. Pathetic, indeed, he is, with a sorrow which occasionally reminds us of poor Thomson, that fearful soul from whose doleful depths welled up "The City of Dreadful Night" and "In the Room." But we could not imagine Morris's writing anything like the Apostrophe to Sleep in Henry IV., Hamlet's "To be or not to be," or that description of Mercy as a quality which "blesseth him that gives and him that takes." Morris is a narrative poet, his only proper place alongside of Homer and Scott in respect of the character of his poetry. The bulk of his lines are as unquotable as Scott's. As with Scott, his concern is for the story, the story, and again the story; and he seldom steps aside from objective description to in-

dulge in moralising soliloquy. But he can well afford to keep his own personality out of his tales. The scenes, incidents, and personages are so engrossing, the setting and atmosphere are so vividly real, the women appear so beautiful and resourceful, the men so simple and heroic, yet both so human, and the themes of Love, Adventure, and Death are so entirely topics for all time, that moralising commentary or statements of principles are altogether unneeded to ensure "the idle singer of an empty day" his place among the immortals.

The publication of "The Earthly Paradise" at intervals from 1868 to 1870 set the seal upon Morris's place in the very front rank of poets. By many "The Earthly Paradise" is mistaken for a poetical description of a social utopia after the manner of Edward Bellamy's "Looking Backward" or the poet's own prose tale "News from Nowhere." "The Earthly Paradise," as already indicated, is really a collection of Greek and mediæval

tales, told in verse so sweet and pure and easy as to be almost cloying. They might, with advantage, be taken along with alternate readings of "Sigurd," which has a long-resounding line, as well as a more sonorous and masterful tone. Certain gentlemen and mariners of Norway, to freely paraphrase the language of the Argument, being moved by the dread of death, cross the seas in quest of a country where death is not. They reach a strange western land, where they are worshipped as gods, but kept in durance in the temple. Escaping during a time of war and civil commotion, they, after many adventures, at length reach a city where they spend the evening of their days hospitably entertained. It is their custom once a month to meet with the city fathers in their guest-house, and, after the banquet, to tell a tale

> of names rememberèd,
> Because they, living not, can ne'er be dead,
> Or long time take their memory quite away
> From us poor singers of an empty day.

Thus each month has its prelude describing the seasonal conditions under which the old men meet, and then follow a couple of stories by members of the company. In the series of twenty-four there is not one tedious tale; and when one thinks of such stories as "The Man Born to be King," "Atalanta's Race," "The Lovers of Gudrun," and "Pygmalion and the Image," the surprising thing is that Morris has not become as popular as Burns in Scotland or as Moore in Ireland. Morris will surely be read with Shakespeare while the English language and literature endure; and if Homer continue to be remembered by the English-speaking peoples, I know of no reason why Morris should be forgotten.

The Socialist poet has been happily placed along with Swinburne and Rosetti, as representing, the three of them together, "The World, the Flesh, and the Devil." Morris is indeed the poet of the World, which with him means, not

barren mountains, lonely tarns, or the sterile cult of inanimate nature in general, but the beauty and devotion of woman, the love and daring of man, and the absorbing interests of man's life and work, especially in bygone, pre-commercial days. The starry heavens, the heaving expense of "the water wan," the midnight witchery of "the brown bird's tune," and the diverse moods and complexions of the varying year—of all these he is the faithful and suggestive painter. But while Nature has her due place in Morris's poetry, we think of him chiefly as the poet of Art and Human Life. The hedgerow, the leafy lane, the cathedral close, the carvings of the banquet hall, the chasing of the wassail cup, the building of the stout ship, the craft of the mariner, the weaver, and the mason, whose trowel, tinkling on the stone high up in the morning air, makes "a thin noise far away"—it is in the weaving of those features and vocations of conventional life into the texture of his tale that

Morris's individuality as a poet largely consists. He sings of Love and Death in a manner which is all his own; but many poets have sung of love and death: he stands alone as the poet of the Romance of Manual Work, of Man-Made Form. Not that there is any theory or ethic of work in his poetry. No poet has written so much and preached so little. If in his earlier poetry there is any "teaching," it takes the form only of specially observant and informed description of the beautiful, with what of suggestion and homily there may be implied in that description. For his definite theories as to art and work we have to turn to his prose.

I make no attempt to indicate the character of Morris's poetry by selections. In one of the "Lives of the Poets"—I forget which—Johnson argues that to endeavour to show the general character of a poet's writings by the citation of particular passages resembles the action of a man who, having a house to sell,

carries about a brick in his pocket as a specimen. This would hardly be true of a sonnetteer or a writer of short lyrics, but it is true of narrative poetry, as the bulk of Morris's poetry is.

But while Morris is first of all a narrative and descriptive poet, telling old tales with an indefinable modernity of conception and treatment, he has also, and that highly developed, the dramatic faculty—the power of going out of himself, putting himself in the place of his characters, and feeling, thinking, and speaking as they would be likely to feel and think and speak in the given circumstances. This power is nowhere better shown than in the poem "Mother and Son" ("Poems by the Way"). This poem not only shows Morris at his best. It also shows that he is no longer "the idle singer of an empty day," leaving to others the task of slaying the "ravening monsters" of social life, but that his own life has now a hope and a purpose in it. And certainly in "Mother and Son" the

poet does not suffer at the hands of the reformer-propagandist.

Though quite modest regarding his poetic attainments, Morris was wholly free from uncandid affectation on the point. He believed he was entitled to a place alongside of Swinburne and Tennyson as one of the three front-rank poets of the century-end. And that is the place which those best qualified to judge—among others, Mr John Morley and Mr James Bryce—frankly and heartily accord him.

## III.—MORRIS'S PROSE.

THE prose of William Morris has a more distinct individuality than even his poetry. Reading much mediæval literature, he would appear to have fairly caught the literary spirit of the chroniclers. He is all that is best in Froissart and Higden, Fortescue, Mandeville, and Piers Plowman, with the greater directness of narrative and the added experience and changed outlook of a man of the nineteenth century. There is the same apt simplicity in the choice of words, the same leisurely mode of telling a tale, as of a man with whom time is no object, the same garrulousness over

details where the emotions are not touched, and the brief, swift strokes where the tale takes a lift into the region of passion, as in the speech of John Ball at the village cross, and that of the headman carle in "A King's Lesson." This last-mentioned short tale is the most characteristic specimen of Morris's prose, and, considered as a tale, it is simply perfect.

Exception has been taken to Morris's archaisms in prose on the ground that they are too archaic. But Morris's taste was so fine, and his acquaintance with mediæval literature so extensive and thorough, that it is not easy to remember one who is fit to fairly criticise him. If he is occasionally more mediæval than were the mediæval writers themselves, at least his archaisms usually stand their ground by their charm and effectiveness; and since he is not professedly writing imitations, what more is required? When Johnson imitates Juvenal, we try him, if we know the Latin poet, by that standard. In the same way, Lintot, the pub-

lisher, after reading Pope's translation of the "Iliad," said: "It's a pretty poem, Mr Pope; but you must not call it Homer." But if Morris adopted no model, we cannot say that he either overshoots the mark or falls short of it. His style must stand or fall on its own merits; and there are many who think it will stand.

At a first reading Morris's prose appears to be lacking in crispness. The laconic, indeed, held no very high place in his theory of dialectics. We have so long been accustomed to the precise periods of that style of which the fashion was set by Addison, which was stiffened by Johnson, and carried to stilted perfection by Macaulay and Emerson, that we are only now beginning to take once again to a style whose ease and continuity have something of the naturalness of colloquial prose. Morris's sentences are long; but they are not involved. They have nothing in common with the prose of the "Areopagitica" or a speech of

Mr Gladstone's. Their length is more a matter of punctuation than an exuberance of verbosity. His complete sentences frequently consist of a string of simple sentences run on with commas and semicolons where other writers would use full stops. Personally I prefer, in the interests of precision and ease in reading, the full stop at the end of every sentence of complete predication (which happens, also, to be the rule given by the grammarians); but when Morris punctuated his periods with commas instead of semicolons, and with semicolons instead of colons or full stops, he did so deliberately, and from a belief that he improved his style by that plan. He frequently spoke with contempt of a certain style as *Telegraphese*, and appeared to regard the sententious, magisterial manner as a warning rather than an example. In this he was at one with Matthew Arnold, who delighted to poke fun at which he called the Corinthian style of the leader-writer. But Morris could be sententious enough

when his theme required it, as witness his lectures, written to be heard rather than read, as also pieces like the speech of John Ball, already mentioned.

What one sometimes feels in reading Macaulay, for instance, is that a given sentence has more connection with the one before it than the one following it—a circumstance of which his practice of uniform full stopping takes no account. His periods savour of the platform rather the desk. His essays seem to be written for listeners in the Oxford Union Debating Society or the House of Commons rather than, as they were, for readers of the *Edinburgh Review*. There is no material difference, either in quality or style, between his Essays and History on the one hand and his political speeches on the other. Now, however admirable the oracular style may be in speech, because of its simplicity and clearness, it becomes pert and wearisome in print, where we can follow a writer's meaning at our leisure, and readily understand a more

involved and continuous mode of expression. The sententious, cut-and-thrust style not only makes short work of the nicer grades and shades of language and the subtle transition-links of expression —giving one the impression that the author refuses to say anything that cannot be pressly put—but this style is really often quite diffuse in consequence of the necessity which it involves of repeating the nouns and pronouns in every choppy sentence in order to complete the syntactical form. The prose of Macaulay and Emerson might, in truth, be compared to a fabric made up of narrow stripes or small chequers, while the style of Milton, Ruskin, or Morris resembles rather a great tapestry in which the figures have and take abundance of room in which to rise and spread. And yet this is truer, after all, of Milton and Ruskin than it is of Morris, whose sentences are long, as already said, not so much by reason of the continuity of expression as the weakness of the punctuation,

which he carries to the extent of positive inaccuracy if the rules of prosody are to count for anything. But verbose, turgid, or involved, Morris certainly is not, and the fact that he is not of the "vigorous and rigorous" school does not involve a lack of crispness. If by crispness be meant cleanness and clearness of expression, Morris has that, as well as a freshness and natural picturesqueness quite unknown in the dogmatic and stilted splendour of Macaulayan prose.

Carlyle has stated somewhere that he never saw a worthy thought expressed in verse without regretting that it had not been expressed in prose. This is tantamount to saying that we should either have no poetry at all or that it should concern itself only with the vapid and the commonplace. His idea would appear to have been that prose was the natural vehicle of sincere expression. It is scarcely likely that it was any such consideration which prompted Morris to betake himself almost exclusively to prose

in his later years. The real reason would appear to lie in the fact that, lecturing much on Art and Socialism since the early "eighties," besides editing *The Commonweal*, he found he could move more easily without the fetters of rhyme or rhythm, and that he could discuss topics in prose that did not lend themselves to poetic treatment, especially in the style of versification he had adopted and mastered.

During the hotly propagandist years from '85 to '90 he wrote "Hopes and Fears for Art," "Signs of Change," "A Dream of John Ball," "News from Nowhere" (avowedly written as a protest against the extremely mechanical and complex social system sketched in "Looking Backward"), "The Revolt of Ghent," "The House of the Wolfings," and a sheaf of pamphlets. Then came the break-up of the Socialist League, which, from being merely anti-Parliamentary as to methods, became Anarchist as to aims; and as Morris never was an

Anarchist, but expressly wrote against it, he practically retired into private life when the League formally declared for Anarchism. The Hammersmith Branch, to which he belonged, continued to exist and hold its meetings under the name of the Hammersmith Socialist Society, and Morris often took the chair and lectured at its meetings, which were held in what had formerly been the coach-house at Kelmscott House, his town residence. He also occasionally appeared at demonstrations of the London Socialists. But from 1891 he ceased to be the leader of a wing of the Socialist party, editing a paper and making frequent lecturing tours among the branch organizations.

From this point begins a new epoch in his literary career. He now turned very decidedly to the writing of prose tales, such as "The Roots of the Mountains," "The Wood beyond the World," "The Story of the Glittering Plain," and "The Well at the World's End," published within a few days of his death.

These books are not easy to classify. There are not novels, not fairy tales, not historical romances, nor romances of chivalry in the style of "Amadis of Gaul" or "Orlando Furioso." Tales of adventure they certainly are, and they have this in common with the fairy tale —that their heroes and heroines get out of difficulties by the free use of magical means. But they do not so entirely belong to the land of faëry as has been supposed. They one and all attempt to realise the life and customs of that dim prehistoric period which preceded the city life of the classic states of antiquity and the feudal system in Western Europe. Were it possible for us to conceive the primitive communism of the gens, to realise the vast gulf which separates us from the Hawks, the Bears, the Goldings, and the Wolfings, with property held in common by the gens or clan, with their exogamic marriage and its accompaniments, their absence of statute law and formal courts, and their freedom

from the slavery and serfdom which came only with the development of the idea of property—if, I say, it were possible to realise this life (so vastly different from that of to-day) and the social conceptions belonging to it, we should do so more readily by means of Morris's prose tales than through the writings of the Maines and Tylors and Spencers and Morgans; though these also have their place and high scientific importance.

That Morris aimed at reviving in literature the life and surroundings of the clan and the *thiod* there is good reason to believe, apart altogether from the evidence of this desire afforded by the stories themselves. Again and again in his lectures and his table talk he referred to the difficulty of conveying by scientific literary treatment an adequate conception of the primitive community, and how and for what reasons it ultimately gave way to the classic city and the feudal manor. It can hardly be said he has succeeded in conveying more than the thinnest and

shadowiest notion of these primitive folk; but perhaps perfect success was impossible in the conditions. Certainly if Morris failed with the equipment he possessed, it is not easy to imagine another succeeding. There is, however, enough adventure and quaint beauty of diction in the stories to render them interesting, and if that be all and more than all we ask of Bocaccio and the "Arabian Nights," why should we look for more from William Morris?

We see Morris's prose style at its best in "A Dream of John Ball." This historical tale, cast in the form of a dream, is an attempt to revivify the character and times of the first English Communist, the so-called "mad priest of Kent," who, with Wat the Tiler, headed the peasants' revolt in the reign of Richard II. The "local colour," the description of a mediæval village, the looks of the people, their dress and arms, the furniture and utensils in the village alehouse, live in these pages with a distinctness and verisi-

militude simply unrivalled in historical literature. Yet the realism is not the mechanical realism of a Zola, whose enumeration of the articles in a room or the commonplace phenomena attending the departure of a railway train, suggest the literary methods of the descriptive reporter, or indeed, at times, the inventory of the bum-bailiff who says to his man, "Take down everything in the house, William, and begin with the clock!" Whether it be the dress of a serving wench, the green-ringed glass in a tavern window, or the tricks of speech, look, or demeanour of the characters, he puts the most delicate literary bloom upon his description of the thing.

But the most striking feature of the book is its dramatic portraiture of the character of John Ball, the levelling hedge priest. Pagan as Morris was, wholly concerned with the "world of men and life," agnostic as regards religion, or rather making a religion of comradeship and the things of sense, he can never-

theless put himself in the place of the Romish priest, and employ just such language as *such* a priest might be expected to use in addressing his fellow-rebels. Says John Ball, addressing the men of Kent from the village cross on the eve of battle :—

Ho, all ye good people! I am a priest of God, and in my day's work it cometh that I should tell ye what ye should do, and what ye should forbear doing, and to that end am I come hither: . . . Forsooth, ye have heard it said that ye shall do well in this world that in the world to come ye may live happily for ever; do ye well, then, and have your reward both on earth and in heaven; for I say to you that earth and heaven are not two, but one; and this one is that which ye know, and are each one of you a part of, to wit, the Holy Church, and in each one of you dwelleth the life of the church, unless ye slay it. Forsooth, brethren, will ye murder the church any one of you, and go forth a wandering man and lonely, even as Cain did who slew his brother? Ah, my brothers, what an evil doom is this, to be an outcast from the church, to have none to love you and to speak with you; to be without fellowship. Forsooth, brothers, fellowship is heaven and lack of fellowship is hell; fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death;

and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship sake that ye do them, and the life that is in it, that shall live on and on for ever, and each one of you a part of it, while many a man's life upon the earth from the earth shall wane. Therefore I bid you not dwell in hell, but in heaven, or, while ye must, upon earth, which is a part of heaven, and forsooth no foul part.

And this is the application of the priest's doctrine of fellowship:—

I have told you of fellowship, and ye have hearkened and understood what the Holy Church is; whereby ye know that ye are fellows of the saints in heaven and the poor men of Essex; and as one day the saints shall call you to the heavenly feast, so now do the poor men call you to the battle.

The speech, however, is not only doctrinal, but full of political passion and prophecy, as it is natural that a speech delivered on the eve of battle should be:—

Men of Kent, ye dwell fairly here, and your houses are framed of stout oak beams, and your own lands ye till; unless some accursed lawyer, with his false, lying sheepskin and forged custom of the Devil's Manor hath stolen it from you; but in Essex slaves they be and villeins, and worse they shall be, and the lords swear that ere a year be over ox and horse

shall go free in Essex, and man and woman shall draw the team and the plough; and north away in the east countries dwell men in poor halls of wattled reeds and mud, and the north-east wind from off the fen whistles through them; and poor they be to the letter; and there him whom the lord spareth the bailiff squeezeth, and him whom the bailiff spareth the easterling chapman sheareth; yet be these stout men and valiant and your very brethren.

And if there be any man here so base as to think that a small matter, let him look to it that if these necks abide under the yoke, Kent shall sweat for it ere it be long; and ye shall lose acre and close and woodland, and be servants in your own houses, and your sons shall be the lords' lads and your daughters their lemans, and ye shall buy a bold word with many stripes, and an honest deed with a leap from the gallows-tree.

Then follows a passage which contains a reminiscence, in the reference to William the Conqueror, of the race feud between Saxon and Norman, which was still, even at that time of day, a feature, though a subordinate one, of the rising headed by Wat Tiler and John Ball. The war was now a war of classes, the cause of the antagonism was economic

rather than racial; but the Kentish peasants being Saxons, and the landlords mainly Normans, the racial hatred still to some degree persisted:—

Bethink ye, too, that ye have no longer to deal with Duke William, who, if he were a thief and a cruel lord, was yet a prudent man and a wise warrior; but cruel are these and headstrong, yea, thieves and fools in one—and ye shall lay their heads in the dust.

John Ball concludes with a prophecy which, although taking its own colour from Morris's genius and opinions, is quite in keeping with the records of "the mad priest's" oratory as handed down to us in history:—

And how shall it be when these are gone? What else shall ye lack when ye lack masters? Ye shall not lack for the fields ye have tilled, nor the houses ye have built, nor the cloth ye have woven; all these shall be yours, and whatso ye will of all that the earth beareth; then shall no man mow the deep grass for another, while his own kine lack cowmeat; and he that soweth shall reap, and the reaper shall eat in fellowship the harvest that in fellowship he hath won; and he that buildeth a house shall dwell in it with those that he biddeth of his free will; and the tithe barn shall garner

the wheat for all men to eat of when the seasons are untoward, and the rain drift hideth the sheaves in August; and all shall be without money and without price. Faithfully and merrily then shall all men keep the holidays of the Church in peace of body and joy of heart. And man shall help man, and the saints in heaven shall be glad, because men no more fear each other; and the churl shall be ashamed, and shall hide his churlishness till it be gone and he be no more a churl; and fellowship shall be established in heaven and on the earth.

That is simply one more picture of the Millennium; but in point of literary beauty there is nothing finer in the Bible. Indeed, in the matter of trenchant directness of language I know of nothing so good in the English of either the Old or the New Testament.

Of the best side of Morris the man, we probably see more in his lectures on Art than in either his poetry or his prose tales. In a previous chapter we have spoken of him as the poet of the Romance of Manual Work and Man-made Form. He is its philosopher as well. And whether he writes in verse

or prose, his language regarding work and man-made beauty is poetical. Not that Morris believed all work to be inherently noble and in its influence elevating. He held no such idea of work as is expressed in Carlyle's dictum that "Work is worship." Work done with flawed or adulterated materials, and scamped as to the time spent on it, was to him essentially ignoble, no matter how titanic the energy imported into it, how vast the scale of operations, nor how unselfish the inspiring motive. He would be no admirer of some of the heroes of Samuel Smiles. He is the poet, in prose as in verse, of the workshop: the counting-house and poetry have nothing to say to each other. While Carlyle viewed work as a moralist and Mr Carnegie views it as a millionaire, Morris regarded it as an artist. He glorified it for neither its pecuniary nor its ethical results, but primarily as one of the sources of direct pleasure, both to the producer and to the possessor. The gradual growth, of the

thing of beauty under the hand of the craftsman, the perfection of form, or colour, or texture in the completed product—these are the aspects of work in which Morris was interested. Among well-known modern writers, John Ruskin is probably the only one who views work in anything like the same light, and even Ruskin seems to think more of the gratification of looking at the finished product than of the joy of the craftsman absorbed in its gradual development. Ruskin regards the thing of beauty with the placid eye of possession, but while Morris is alive to the pleasures of possession, he has more to say of the eager joy of pursuit—of creation. Art, he claimed, was introduced, not primarily for the pleasure of the user, but primarily for the pleasure of the craftsman. In such essays as "The Aims of Art," "Art and Socialism," "Gothic Architecture," "The Future of Architecture," and the lectures embodied in "Hopes and Fears for Art," is to be found some of his most

strenuous writing; and in those papers we get to know more of Morris and his personal likes and dislikes than in any other writings of his. What his theories of Work and Art specifically are will be told in two further papers.

## IV.—MORRIS AS ART CRAFTSMAN.

IN 1861 the poet of Arthurian legend, with fine artistic audacity, turned his attention to business, with the view of, among other things, showing the commercial man how far he had travelled from the best—not the quickest and cheapest, but the best—methods of production. In all there were eight partners in the concern, but Morris supplied most of the money and most of the brains. The undertaking arose out of much talk and interchange of views as to the

superiority of mediæval work over the machine-made products turned out to pass muster on the market and sell at a profit rather than to use and enjoy. For four years the brotherhood (including, at first, for some purposes, practically the whole of the Pre-Raphaelites) carried on business at 8 Red Lion Square, W.C., but removed in 1865 to 26 Queen Square, Bloomsbury, Morris taking up his abode on the premises so that he might the more closely supervise the various branches of the work. It was not till 1881 that Merton Abbey, a monastery built in the reign of King Stephen, was secured as a workshop, Morris about this time buying out the other partners, and becoming himself the sole proprietor. Here were carried on the making of furniture and the dyeing of yarns, the staining of glass, the weaving of fabrics, and the printing of calicoes—in short, the production of all those beautiful goods which have, by their influence, done so much to revolutionise the whole practice

(we cannot yet call it an art) of house decoration.

In a letter to an American lady, now no more, who was an enthusiastic admirer of Morris and his work, the poet thus describes the motives which inspired him as a master craftsman :—

I have tried to produce goods which should be genuine as far as their mere substances are concerned, and should have on that account the primary beauty in them which belongs to naturally treated natural substances; have tried, for instance, to make woollen substances as woollen as possible, cotton as cottony as possible, and so on; have used only the dyes which are natural and simple, because they produce beauty almost without the intervention of art; all this quite apart from the design in the stuffs or what not. On that head it has been, chiefly because of the social difficulties, almost impossible to do more than to insure the *designer* (mostly myself) some pleasure in his art by getting him to understand the qualities of materials and the happy chances of processes. Except with a small part of the more artistic side of the work, I could not do anything (or at least but little) to give this pleasure to the workmen, because I should have had to change their method of work so utterly that I should have disqualified them from earning

their living elsewhere. You see I have got to understand thoroughly the manner of work under which the art of the Middle Ages was done, and that that is the *only* manner of work which can turn out popular art, only to discover that it is impossible to work in that manner in this profit-grinding society. So on all sides I am driven towards revolution as the only hope, and am growing clearer and clearer on the speedy advent of it in a very obvious form, though of course I can't give a date for it.

Morris's theory in art was that ornament should be expended only on useful things. He believed that if you carved and ornamented your furniture, buildings, and utensils, and made them sound, massive, and well-proportioned, you would have neither inclination nor means for useless *bric-a-brac* and the wretched upholstery and drapery that cumber and make tawdry the rooms of old-fashioned houses. The peacock's feathers, the everlasting grass, the dainty bulrushes in imitation Japanese vases, the "ornaments," the tidies and wrappings on chairs and sofas, the artificial flowers and gewgaw fans,—one could imagine Morris

wanting to gather these in his arms and consign them to the nearest dustheap. If your furniture was meant to be seen why should it be covered and hidden? If it was meant to be used, why should it look and be as if it were not? The changes introduced by Morris and Co. include the substitution of plain oak and pine furniture, painted or stained so as to bring out the natural grain of the wood, for the unwieldy mahogany or veneer, with curly legs, and feet moulded to represent the claws and paws of birds and beasts; solid tables, plain, open-backed chairs, seats with movable cushions, tile-backed washstands, all of simple yet elegant construction, and all light, durable, and comparatively inexpensive. Everybody must have noticed the change effected, many must have been conscious of it in process, but comparatively few busy people are aware that it is due to William Morris more than to anyone else. A working-man critic said of the furniture in Morris's own house that it was

splendid, and you could fill your pipe on any article in it without doing any damage!

That we should take joy in things of beauty was, of course, a cardinal principle with Morris, but he held also that the thing of utility should be a thing of beauty, and that if we were duly concerned to have all useful things beautiful, there would be little call for expending art on things that were *merely* pretty. He was never tired of inveighing against the wastefulness of Commercialism, which with him meant not only the wastes engendered by lack of organisation in production and distribution, but the waste of producing useless things merely because they were supposed to be pretty. Remembering that our houses were largely jerry-built, our clothes often shoddy, and our furniture machine-made gimcrack and veneer, he could see no sense in producing toys and *bric-a-brac*. The substantially-elegant, the simply-beautiful appeared in all his work and

surroundings. His jacket was usually blue serge, his shirt was woollen, with latterly no necktie under its turn-down collar, his boots were plain, honest calf, his hat was a soft felt capable of standing any amount of kneading and knocking about, and in winter-time (or in rainy weather, for he carried no umbrella) he wore either a rough grey Inverness cloak or a plain blue pilot-like overcoat. As Morris usually had a theory and a reason regarding everything about him, one could not help being interested in everything he used or wore.

He extracted his dyes from plants grown in the garden at Merton Abbey: he would use no drysaltery. He believed only in vegetable dyes, and justified his belief by the colours he produced with them. Although displaying always a marked preference for frank colours, it has been his misfortune to be associated with a sickly greenish yellow which was his pet abomination. The blue of his own clothes, and the maroons, greens,

and scarlet-and-gold bindings of his books indicate tastes as far removed as possible from the washed-out æstheticism so delightfully satirised by W. S. Gilbert in the opera of "Patience."

Morris's wall-papers are known to many who know nothing of Morris the poet and the Socialist. I have heard country painters, commissioned by patrons of taste to procure a Morris wall-paper, grumble over his prices, his refusal to give discount, or pay carriage, and the insistence on "cash with order," which formed part of the business methods of the firm. I once bantered Morris on this point, and his prompt answer was: "The price was for the paper, not for the carriage. What's the good of fixing a price if it *isn't* fixed—if you're going to give some of it back again?" The pre-Morris wall-paper was of fearful and wonderful sprawling pattern, and frequently of raucous hues. I cannot think of the typical pre-Morris paper without remembering what a friend used to say

about check suits. He said he did not object to check suits provided the check were big enough. He preferred the check so large that a suit could be made from the centre of it, and all the pattern left out. Unless your wall were expansive, you stood a chance of leaving out part of the pattern of a typical pre-Morris wall-paper. It was a pre-Morris paper that the doctor had in view when he assured the lady that her son, who was his patient, would recover from the fever in a few days and from the wall-paper in a few weeks. It would be impossible to describe the general characteristics of Morris's wall-papers in a sentence. His designs are by no means homogeneous. He protested against elaborate or involved patterns, which refused to readily disclose their meaning, or to be resolved into their elements—patterns in which the lines were not to be traced to their source. While some of Morris's patterns are simple—an acanthus or a marigold printed in a single colour—others are bold and

frank, though never staring, in a number of colours. The only features they all have quite certainly in common are genius and simplicity. That his conception of what a wall-paper should be has found favour is shown, not alone by the fact that Morris's papers have been largely used, but by the crop of imitations which has sprung up, in which both the style and the colouring have been copied. Indeed all wall-papers are better for the example which Morris set. The printing of wall-papers was at first done by Morris's own employees, but had long before Morris's death been entrusted to Mr Metford Warner, the acting principal of Messrs Jeffrey & Co., Essex Road, Islington, the designs of course remaining the property of Morris & Co.

Work was carried on at Merton Abbey under ideal conditions. By the letter from which an extract has been given we learn that Morris was not able to make his system of production all that he wished it to be; but it went far to trans-

form the artizan into an artist, and employer and employee into comrades and fellow-workers. Giving them his own designs and ideas to work out, neither adequate time nor the very finest materials were grudged them for the doing of worthy work worthily. They were set above the tyranny of the market price, and the prime concern was for perfection in the product whatever that might be. Within reasonable limits they came and went as they pleased. Their pay was higher than any given in the same trades elsewhere. A collection of fine books, finely printed and bound, was kept on the premises for their use. In the summer season the roses nodded in upon them at the open windows, and no "snorting steam or piston stroke," disturbed them in this home of the handicrafts. There was profit-sharing with the heads of departments, or, as Morris himself said, "not to use too grand a word, foremen if you please, although properly speaking we have no foremen";

but this system of profit-sharing he found it neither so necessary to extend to the men, "nor so easy to arrange a scheme." In the printing office which he added in 1891 to the other departments of his business he paid the highest trade union rate of wages, "kept no time book," and made no deductions for holidays. By all accounts he was the heartiest and friendliest of employers.

And that same printing office was one of the most notable of his practical activities in the domain of art craftsmanship. Mr Colebrook, formerly editor of the *Printing Times and Lithographer*, who has published an informed and interesting lecture on "William Morris, Master Printer," traces Morris's printing departure to the interest and hopefulness aroused in him by what he saw at the London Biennial Arts and Crafts Exhibition of 1891. From conversation and correspondence with Morris, however, I have reason to know that his attention was much drawn to printing in the

eighties, while he was editor of *The Commonweal* and almost proprietor of the office in which it was set up (the machining being done outside). Be that as it may, in letterpress printing Morris again showed the practical men what the amateur with taste and a theory (and money) can do.

Starting out with the idea that the printed book, considered as a work of art, is after all merely a cheap and handy substitute for the more artistic written and illuminated book of the monkish *scriptores*, Morris took these, with reasonable qualifications, as his model. In designing his type he aimed at combining the best features of the black Gothic letter of the early printers—full of the "beauty of incident" as it was—with the pale mechanical Roman type of today. For beauty and legibility I say as a practical printer that I have seen nothing finer than the character he has produced. I have heard him lecture to an audience of printers on "Printed Books,

Ancient and Modern"—the lecture illustrated by lantern slides—and so long as he merely talked—somewhat labouredly be it admitted—about printing, one could see that his audience listened rather contemptuously, as if they thought this amateur not a little audacious to offer to teach them in the practice of their own art. But when he passed from talking about print to throw on the screen sundry specimen pages from books of his own printing, they broke into involuntary applause. They could not choose but own the charm.

Morris's broad outer margins have been attacked by some practical printers, who cannot see why the printed page should not be placed with rectilineal accuracy in the centre of the paper. But Morris knew, as the *scriptores* knew, as the early printers knew, and as everybody with a genuine taste for books knows—or at any rate *feels*—that the true artistic unity is not the single printed page, but the two pages side by side in the

open book. As a matter of fact, Morris's margins are not always broad. He is fond of surrounding the outsides of alternate pages with a border which fills in the margin pretty well to the edge of the paper; and his borders are so beautifully chaste and spirited that our only regret is that he does not surround the outsides of all his pages with them; though to do this without monotonously repeating the same borders would, of course, have involved great additional labour and expense. Morris used to justify the placing of a border on alternate pages by saying that the stupid bookbinder could not cut away the broad margins of the unbordered pages without "bleeding" the bordered ones. Thus we have both the borders and the margins left intact, and the vandal binder is set at defiance!

Morris had his paper manufactured specially for himself from pure white linen rags, and his inks were of pure lampblack. Your "Decline and Fall"

in the Chandos Classics will pale six years after printing, and even your *edition de Luxe*, turned out by the ordinary printer with the ink of commerce, will turn sick at the end of a score of years; but Morris's blacks and reds promise to be everlasting as the hills, as the Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde colours are. Morris did not believe in glazed papers; an honest paper did not require glazing; and he often said that some of the daily newssheets were printed on better paper than that which passed muster, by dint of glazing, in high-priced books. Another idea of his was that a work of literature, as apart from mere books of reference or ephemeral publications, should not be printed in a type smaller than pica—that is, one-sixth of an inch in depth. His proposal for a small pica Bradshaw (small pica is the type with which this book is printed) was perhaps nothing more than a joke, intended to arrest attention to his plea for bigger type in

general; though at the same time he used to complain that in consulting the time table he could not readily tell a "3" from an "8" in the small and thickly printed figures of Bradshaw. Take his books all in all, they are the finest specimens of letterpress printing extant, and already the influence of his taste is observable in the printing world, at least in so far as the designing of types is concerned. Mr De Vinne, the great American letterfounder, is reputed to be his ardent admirer, and the types known by the name of "De Vinne," and Venetian which stare at us from so many specimens of good printing just now, closely resemble Morris's "Golden" type, and are of recent production. His Golden type has actually been extensively copied.

That Morris's work as a letterpress printer will also have, is indeed already having, its influence on printing in general, there is good reason to believe. Even in commercial Manchester, with its rush and drive, in production as in all else, I

have heard compositors of the younger generation express enthusiasm for Morris's work, of which they had seen specimens at the Art and Crafts Exhibition, as well as at Mr Colebrooke's lecture on Morris and the lecture delivered by the master printer himself. But while declaring their belief that printing might really be an art, as it nominally is already, they did not fail to recognise—that which did so much to drive Morris to Socialism—that the conditions of work under commercialism forbade more than imitation, at a long distance, of Morris's work. With this view I do not entirely agree. The element of truth in it lies in the fact that genuine materials are difficult to procure; while the handpress, on which Morris's stiff inks could alone could be worked, is, of course, out of the question for commercial work and "long numbers."* But in composition the pro-

* For the benefit of the uninitiated, it may be explained that the cylinder machine presses the unprinted sheet swiftly on the inked types, and

ducts of the Kelmscott Press are more remarkable for their artistic simplicity than for the laborious elaboration to which the modern "art" printer is addicted; and here Morris's style can have and is having its influence. Instead of piling up large masses of border and ornament, composed of a multitude of small pieces, the practical printer might use simple and elegant borders of a larger design on a larger body, and instead of spending so much time over brass-rule adjustments and repeated workings in colours and with bronze powders, he might save money in these directions to expend it on better papers and inks and newer and better type.

Morris was, in every branch of artistic production, a simplifier, substituting taste

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the use of an ink of stiff consistency would lead to the tearing of the paper, especially with the heavy-faced type (taking a greater supply of ink) used by Morris. On the hand-press, again, the printed sheet can be slowly lifted from the types, and thus a stiff ink and bold type can be used with less fear of tearing the paper.

for labour, beauty for elaboration. He has laid down a Decalogue for Printers; but at the end of the tale he confesses that there is no rule of beauty, no guide save the seeing eye as the organ of the knowing mind. Have a theory certainly, but be always open to monitions of the beautiful, and modify your theory as changing taste or added experience suggest. Shelley is not more a poet for poets than Morris is a craftsman for craftsmen. He began his work by writing the tale beautiful; he made the wall beautiful, the floor beautiful, the home beautiful; and his last great concern was for the book beautiful. So long as the eyes are the windows of the soul, and the sense of sight is valued, the work of such artists as Morris will be reckoned among the highest services man can perform for men.

## V.—MORRIS'S MESSAGE AS A SOCIALIST.

ERHAPS the majority of those who become Socialists do so as a result of their revolt against the more purely economic injustice of Individualistic conditions: they do not get that amount of leisure, pleasure, solid comfort, or, in short, hard cash to which they believe their merits entitle them. These normal motives could hardly have operated with William Morris, a comparatively rich man, an artist who, so far from grumbling about his work as hard, was then most happy when hardest at work, as he might

well be, considering the nature of the work. No; Morris was a Socialist primarily from revolt against the meanness and ugliness of life and its appurtenances under a commercial civilization. It was enough for him that Commerce defiled Nature, made a drudge of the workman, and produced towns and cities which were brick-and-mortar abominations. The river turned into an open sewer, the physically flawed men and women, dying out in the third and fourth generation, the air polluted with smoke and chemical gases, the jerry building, the shoddy fabric, the absence of pleasure and dignity in the ordinary work of production—these were the chief counts in his indictment of Individualism. In the Middle Ages—his favourite period of history—there was enough and to spare of open-handed violence; but at least the craftsman had pleasure and hope in his work, and built cities like Rouen and Oxford, which the men of the nineteenth century could only muddle away by

hopeless vandalism and stupid greed, their own crowning achievements being works like the Ship Canal and the Tower Bridge. It was the love of beauty and the desire for art and pleasure in the everyday work of the world that led Morris to Socialism. By giving men time to their work, by using genuine materials, and by dispensing with machinery wherever the machine extinguished skill and individuality in the workman and did the work less worthily, he hoped once again to make labour pleasant and to evolve a genuine popular art. He did not believe labour was necessarily a curse and a pain : it might be a pleasure to the mind and a blessing to the body: whether it was so or not depended entirely on the nature of the labour.

Morris's message as a Socialist is nowhere better shortly stated than in the following passages from "Art and Socialism":—

I have looked at this claim by the light of history and my own conscience, and it seems to me, so looked at, to be a most just claim, and

that resistance to it means nothing short of a denial of the hope of civilization.

This, then, is the claim :—

*It is right and necessary that all men should have work to do that shall be worth doing, and be of itself pleasant to do ; and which should be done under such conditions as would neither make it over-wearisome nor over-anxious.*

Turn that claim about as I may, think of it as long as I can, I cannot find that it is an exorbitant claim ; yet again I say if society would or could admit it, the face of the world would be changed ; discontent and strife and dishonesty would be ended. To feel that we were doing work useful to others and pleasant to ourselves, and that such work could not fail us, what serious harm could happen to us then? And the price to be paid for so making the world happy is Revolution : Socialism instead of *Laissez-faire.*

It was little wonder if a message like that fell upon ears mostly deaf to its import. The workman, who might be conscious of the *possibility* at least of this pleasure, is inarticulate, and his main concern is, moreover, his wages rather than his work, small blame to him ; while the literary man, who shapes public opinion, can have little conception of the

pleasures of manual creation, never, properly speaking, having worked with his hands. Here and there a man of wealth and leisure takes to turning, carpentry, or type-setting as a recreation; but these, with, so far as I know, the single exception of Peter Kropotkine (a prince but *not* a man of wealth and leisure), have not dared to hope, or at any rate to express the hope, that the pleasure which was to them merely a recreation could be imported generally into the ordinary work of the world. This, however, and more than this, was Morris's claim, persistently urged in his writings and speeches as a Socialist. Carrying on a popular propaganda, he had to be more or less of a political economist; he had struggled with the syllogisms and algebraical formulas of Karl Marx; and I have heard him speak in private with great admiration of how Mr. G. Bernard Shaw could "put an opponent behind the fire" (as he phrased it) in controversy about points of economics; but it was as an art craftsman,

bent on making the producer happy and the product genuine and beautiful, that he always spoke and wrote.

Morris's views are little heeded and less understood even by many of his Socialist friends, who declare for "the enhancement of the productivity of labour" by its subdivision and the increased use of machinery. It is true he gathered around him in the Socialist League a number of young men—draughtsmen, designers, and artists, Walter Crane among the latter—who were drawn to the Socialist movement largely by the hope that its triumph would supply the social conditions necessary to the due nurture and encouragement of the arts. But apart from these, Morris's art and his art theories have found their admirers chiefly among people who are either old-fashioned Tories or have no politics at all. The admirers of both Ruskin and Morris are to be found more among a certain limited class of refined conservatives—in the general sense—than among the aver-

age run of progressively-minded people. Sir Wilfrid Blunt, for instance, was a warm admirer of Morris's products. It is almost needless to say that such social conservatives—where they have any definite views—would merely wish to go *back* to old-fashioned methods of production, while Morris proposed to go *forward* to the even better methods of a generally revolutionised social system. Not a few persons who would resent being classed among the admirers of Morris carry his theories a good deal further than he did. Mrs Lynn Linton, whose opinions became increasingly conservative as she advanced in years, declared to an interviewer shortly before her death that she would not use a typewriter because there was no individuality in type-written work. Now, for manuscript produced for the purely temporary purpose of serving as "copy" to the printer, or for letters to be read once and then laid aside or destroyed, Morris had no hesitation about using a typewriter.

The "copy" of his famous reprint of Chaucer was, I understand, entirely type-written from a British-Museum copy of the "Tales," and much of his private correspondence, in which he was assisted by an amanuensis, was type-written.

It has been said that many of Morris's Socialist friends neither understood nor sympathised with his views as to the relation of Art and Socialism. It is, indeed, not unnatural that those whose protest against Individualism is inspired by their poverty should wish to see the world's wealth increased in quantity rather than quality. But Morris held that poverty arose, not so much from scarcity of wealth in the community as a whole as from the inequitable distribution of the wealth actually existing. The deepest depth of individual poverty—absolute destitution—was most frequently to be seen in the richest countries. The most prosperous period of British trade and agriculture—the first half of the century—was the period of the most widespread pauperism,

every agricultural labourer in the parish being, in some districts, on the poor roll. The drawbacks to our wealth, then, were, in Morris's view, qualitative rather than quantitative; though he never failed to urge that as a community we kept ourselves much poorer than we need be by wastefully neglecting to organise the production and distribution of goods. Man wants but little here below, but wants that little good, and, with the knowledge of processes and the dexterity in manipulation which we now possess, the concern need no longer be for making production ever faster and cheaper, but better and pleasanter. If our forefathers in the Middle Ages, working an eight hours day of leisurely labour, and unaided by the machinery we now possess in such abundance, were able to produce enough and to spare of the comforts and luxuries of life, why should not we be able to revert to some of the simple manual processes, using machinery only for irredeemable drudgery. Abolish the thousand-

and-one wastes of competitive commerce, said Morris in effect, set all the idle hands and heads to work, and you may discard nine-tenths of your machinery, and turn your salesmen and touts and machine-minders into intelligent, self-respecting men and craftsmen. "Man's chief end" is neither to produce goods with the greatest possible speed nor to consume them in the largest possible amount, but to be the best possible man. Anything, therefore, which robs men of skill or strength or legitimate pleasure is a hurtful thing, of which a free and a sensible community will rid itself as soon as may be. Morris objected to the workman being degraded by specialization into a mere cog in the industrial machine, a maker of pin-heads or pin-points, incapable of feeling pride or pleasure in the work of his hands, and having his faculties narrowed down to the performance of a single monotonous function year in year out.

It must not be supposed that Morris utterly contemned machinery. He recog-

nised that much of the world's work was and probably always would be of the nature of mere drudgery; and for such work he would have mechanical contrivances used to the fullest possible extent. Indeed, for navvying, street-sweeping, and a great deal of domestic work he would have machinery used to a greater extent than it is now. But from the point of view of popular art, labour-saving appliances have been introduced first where they ought to have been introduced last or not at all; and conversely. Where the standard of skill is high, wages more or less correspond, and the comparatively independent workers are exacting in their demands as to the general conditions of labour. Consequently it is here that the capitalist has the strongest motive to adopt machinery, since by so doing he tends to set himself above the "tyranny" of the organised manual workers. Where the labour is unskilled, abundant, and consequently cheap, the motive to adopt machinery is very much weakened. The

master printer, galled by the assertive independence of his trade-union compositors, has spent money on one comparatively useless type-setting machine after another, whereas the farmer, the railway company, and the sewering contractor still have their work done very much as it was done fifty years ago, the general labourer being much less troublesome to his employers than the skilled and well-organised artizan.

But while Morris believed there was a place for machinery, he was jealous of machinery applied without regard to æsthetic considerations and to the pleasure of the craftsman in his work. Instead of striving to abolish irksome manual labour by the application of machinery, his endeavour would be to, if possible, divest it of its irksomeness, since it was to him certain that the tending of the machine must be irksome—that there could be next to no room for the expression of artistic individuality in such work. Have as many tools as you can reasonably use,

and let your tools be as perfect as they can be made: a tool helps the hand and eye to accomplish their purpose, whereas a machine altogether supersedes the hand and eye.

With machinery invading every department of life, there threatens to arrive a time when the engineer's shop will be the only place where the seeing eye and the cunning hand will be of any use. Thus we shall have more and cheaper goods; but shall we have better goods, and what is more important still, shall we have better men? It cannot for a moment be pretended that either the worker or the thing he produces will in the long run profit by machinery. The handloom produced incomparably better cloth than the power loom does to-day, and the handloom weaver was an intelligent and spirited person, who, in spite of his nominally long hours, found time for much reading and discussion. William Thom, one of the best of Scotland's minor poets, whose lines are quoted by

London journalists not always aware of their origin,* was a weaver to the end of his days, returning to his loom after being lionised for a season in London and Edinburgh. Dr. Alexander Bain conned his Latin Grammar while he wove petticoat winceys. But the power-loom "weaver" of to-day is a young women whose chief interest in work is centred in the number of yards she can produce in a week, whose loom has to be kept in order for her by a tenter, and who is satisfied if her web can pass muster with the not-too-exacting cloth inspector. The fabric produced by the handloom weaver was ready for the market when he unrolled it from the beam; but the power loom weaver's

* I remember being amused at a quotation from "The Mitherless Bairn" which appeared in that exceedingly clever London evening paper the *Star*. It occurred in the report of a dog show. In describing a great St. Bernard, the report sought to convey an idea of the gentleness of the big dog by invoking the line "He bends to your bidding and blesses your smile."

cloth has to be "picked" of loose out-hanging threads and "finished" in calenders before it can go to the warehouse. A fabric "worth a hundred florins the Bremen ell" may well be described as a "cloth such as men make not now." And how will the book of the future, printed from lino. castings, compare with the radiant volumes printed from movable types at Kelmscott House or the Chiswick Press? The average compositor of to-day is not a particularly lusty specimen of manhood; but even he is a better man than will be his successor, the lino. operator, who sits all day on a low stool feverishly dabbing a keyboard, while he inhales the fumes from the melting-pot of his machine. And who is any richer for either the power-loom or the linotype machine? The manufacturer's margin of profit is smaller to-day than ever it was. Neither he nor the consumer derives any advantage from the power-loom. If the cloth is half the price, it gives but half the wear. Again, books and newspapers

were already cheap enough, perhaps too cheap, before the introduction of the linotype machine, and printers, both men and masters, found a livelihood. There was no technical difficulty standing in the way of rapid production where rapid production was necessary, such as justified the substitution of the cylinder machine for the hand press, which could not turn out the newssheets fast enough. But for good or evil, the lino. is here, and compositors are being thrown into the streets in thousand; the country will be flooded with trashy reprints; the lino. machinists will earn higher wages, but will have their lives shortened by the nature of their work; and it is doubtful if a single lino. owner will be a penny the richer for his machines, since his neighbours have machines as well as he, and prices are "cut" as much as ever. Does not this apply to most, if not all, mechanical developments?

If a system of production robs the workman of health and pleasure and in-

dividuality, and his work of beauty and honesty, without ultimately benefiting either the capitalist or the public, what more need be said in its condemnation? Nay, if only the product and the producer suffer from the system, should not that be enough to secure its abolition at the hands of a community not mastered and driven by its own machinery?

Many of the Socialist opponents of Morris's teaching wish to see machinery increasingly applied, they say, because it will render possible an enormous increase of leisure. With his hours of labour reduced to two or three per day, the workman of the future is to study science and languages, is to cultivate music and photography, and is to excel in all athletic sports. It appears there is to be leisure for all things save work. That must always be feverish, must be got through hastily as a thing to be done with. This would be indeed a monstrous state of affairs, and we may well hope and strive to prevent the making of the things we

use and wear and look at being left to the tender mercies of capitalists in haste to be rich and drudges who have never stopped to think of aught beyond their wages and the pleasure of spending them. Morris, however, held that a society of free men would rather do six hours' pleasant work a-day than three hours of unpleasant work. As for popular culture, to which he was more favourable than most men, he argued that the average man did not want to become a lecturer, a writer, a musician, or what not, and that the mere desire to excel in learning or accomplishments for their own sake would not carry a man very far. The average man had neither the desire nor the aptitude to become a kind of Admirable Crichton. He wanted some one business which should be the main concern of his life—his "work" properly so-called—and a considerable part of every day he would want to devote to that. The attempt to transform him into a dilettante would in most cases make of him only a mischievous

loafer, as the lives of too many of the idle rich already tend to show.

One of the objects of machinery is to save physical exertion, and, bent as we are on minimising physical labour, we banish it more and more from our industrial processes, even where it is capable of giving serene and unfailing pleasure. But Nature will have her revenge. To keep ourselves in health we must have recourse to that most tedious of all the duties of the modern man—to wit, taking exercise. We must drearily swing and jump and lift weights in gymnasiums; we must plod along dusty roads upon bicycles, and play cricket, football, and tennis. Is it not possible to have some of this physical exertion in the course of labour which has a value in itself? A sensible man will rather dig in a garden than swing a pair of Indian clubs; but the logical outcome of present mechanical tendencies is that he should one day turn a machine loose in his garden to do the work, while he sits on the fence to watch it, taking

his bout with the clubs afterwards. It really appears as if the mechanicians would leave us with no serious use for any part of our bodies save the brains, and not much use even for them.

But while jealous of machinery, and, for reason good, in many respects frankly hostile to it, Morris recognised that there must be more machinery before there was less. The world would go on robbing itself of art and healthful pleasure until the great change was brought about which made the makers of wealth the owners of it. That great change would carry with it the abolition of all the main forms of social waste—the waste of a class of idle rich and a class of idle poor, the waste of war and war establishments, the waste of unorganised production and of distribution so chaotic that almost as many people were employed in the selling of goods as in the making of them. With the disappearance of all these forms of waste we should sooner or later find ourselves with so much time on our hands

that a return to handicraft in many directions would inevitably suggest itself. Then we should insist on having pleasure in our work as in everything else. Then men would master things instead of being mastered and driven by them. Then we might once again evolve an art "of the people and for the people" not inferior to the art of Greece, of India, and of mediæval Europe.

It was primarily because Socialism could alone render this possible that William Morris was a Socialist. His message was meant to further the development of an art by the people and for the people, and his protest was not primarily against long hours and low wages, but against the spurious and the ugly, and the drudgery of making the spurious and the ugly by tedious mechanical processes. May the kindly fates send him successors in this mission, for it is a gospel little preached and much needed.

## VI.—MORRIS THE MAN.

HEN, shortly after Morris's death in 1896, his will was proved, the fact that he left a large fortune to his relatives, but made no bequest to the funds of the Socialist organizations, excited much hostile comment. His case is still the subject of occasional derisive references turning on the discrepancy between profession and practice; though it is noteworthy that this antipathetic criticism comes from those who are without the Socialist movement rather than from those who are within it.

It appears to have been rather resented

that Morris should have possessed a fortune at all. But the truth is that he neither put himself to much trouble to make money nor denied himself reasonable gratifications in order to save it. His money was mostly inherited in the form of good investments, and his resources grew without effort on his part, and while, in fact, he was busying himself with concerns in which the element of pecuniary profit was altogether a minor consideration. It is true he sold his carpets and wallpapers at high prices; but I have never heard it argued that those prices were in excess of the commercial value of the goods. In at least one undertaking —the reprint of the "Canterbury Tales" —he is understood to have actually lost a considerable sum of money. The edition was limited to 400 copies, which were sold before the sheets were printed, at £20 a copy. In other words, the entire edition was purchased by the well-known bookseller, Mr Bernard Quarritch, for £8000. But to finish the book as Morris

desired to finish it, cost, it was calculated, £9000; so that there was a here a "drop" of £1000. There is no manifest sign of grasping greed about a man who does his work so well that he loses money by it.

What would the critics have had Morris do? A gift of £1000 to each of the three Socialist bodies in Britain would have been a proof of sincerity and good will maintained up to the end. But apart from that, what good, even from the Socialist point of view, could have been accomplished by such bequests?

With money, lecturers could have been sent out, elections could have been fought, and newspapers, books, and pamphlets could have been scattered broadcast to advertise the Millennium like a patent medicine. But money could not command more eloquence and sincerity than the party possesses already without the help of money. The best work of the party has been done for it by men who neither had nor expected money reward, as is the best work of all parties. With money,

election expenses could be paid; but votes could only be legitimately secured from an enlightened and convinced electorate, and this change of opinion and sentiment is what money cannot buy. The party already possesses more than enough journals for all the capable writers and interested readers it possesses. To scatter subsidised literature gratuitously would be to give the public that which it would neither value nor profit by. What the Socialist movement wants is not money, but men; and given the men, money for elections, votes for candidates, newspapers for readers, and all the *materiel* of a successful movement are already found. The Irish are not exactly a nation of bloated plutocrats; but they are a nation of political rebels, and whatever their political struggles have lacked, they have never failed for lack of money.

The world has seen many movements which were sought to be galvanised into artificial life by the subsidies of rich men with a personal end to serve. But the

brief and abortive careers of such movements form only another long chapter in the history of the world's failures. A movement broad-based upon a people's will needs no rich man's subsidies, and without the goodwill of the people, subsidies will avail no movement. Wallace, Bruce, William Tell, Richard Cameron, Massaniello, Charles Stuart, Dumouriez, Napoleon, Garibaldi, Parnell—none of these attracted his followers by the power of money. A great idea, an electric personality, and the promise of success will move men to deeds of heroism and years of self-sacrificing labour and privation such as all the wealth of all the world cannot evoke.

Morris's money could not very obviously have helped. What could help was his genius, and of that, during a series of years, he gave with lavish profusion, sacrificing time and enduring discomfort, both mental and physical, in the attempt to further the realization of his social ideal. If in failing health and perhaps

waning powers he gave no sign of continued zeal in a cause of which he had shortly before been the poet and the prophet, at least there was a time when for that cause no sacrifice was too great and no service too lowly.

Those who knew Morris do not need to have it proved to them that he was not parsimonious. I have already spoken of his generous treatment of his employees. He would, in fact, appear to have been the most generous employer ever known in the branches of industry which he had taken up. Apart from that, he, even in money matters, did his full duty by the movement in which he was a worker.

For some years he vainly subsidised a Socialist newspaper to the extent of several pounds a-week, besides giving his services as editor gratuitously. During the whole period of his connection with the movement he kept open house at Hammersmith. The coachhouse attached to his residence he set apart for the meetings of the Hammersmith Socialist

Society, keeping it in repair and heating and lighting it at his own cost to the day of his death. His supper parties at the close of those meetings were enjoyed by a large circle of friends; and Hammersmith men tells us that his private bounty was appreciated in many a household in the poorer parts of his own neighbourhood. I cannot forget how, when a weekly paper in which I was interested ceased to appear, Morris, all unsolicited, sent me a remittance towards the loss which he thought might have been sustained, accompanied by a kindly note, all the way to granitic Aberdeen.

He had a lively interest in the Socialist movement in Scotland, and enjoyed a Scottish lecturing tour above all his other circuits. London Socialists love to tell of how Morris offered to hawk the *Commonweal* in the Strand, and was with difficulty persuaded from doing so. The older Scottish Socialists have even more fondness in recalling how he, one of the most distinguished men in Europe, used

to sit in a little room on the ground floor of a house in a shabby Glasgow street, keeping a company of working men in merry pin while waiting for the clouds to roll by that they might fare forth and hold an open-air meeting. On such occations he was the liveliest and most good-natured of companions; although in conversation he never "performed"—never talked *to* you instead of *with* you, as a less modest and sympathetic man in his position might have done.

Some of the "superior persons" who have declared Morris to be lacking in humour would have had their misconception of him thoroughly dispelled by an hour spent in his society at such times. His poetry, indeed, gives little evidence that he possessed humour; but surely those who look for humour in a Greek tale, told in heroic verse, are themselves somewhat deficient in the quality which does so much to preserve a fine mental balance. A brilliant converser, Morris really overran with wit and humour of

every kind, from the boisterous fun of private conversation up to the subtlest insinuations of the incongruous in a familiar letter or the more carefully-turned printed period.

Four young Scotsmen, on a holiday run to the metropolis, called on Morris at Kelmscott House. They had taken their luggage to a hotel; but Morris would have it that they should all four come and put up with him during the few days they were to be in town. One of the quartette—a Glasgow workman of the better sort—had his hair cut very close, as was his practice. This catching Morris's eye, he remarked in the most offhand manner: "You look, H——, as though you had recently suffered for the Cause!"

In the discussion following a lecture on art in the home, he was asked by a man in the audience to suggest a suitable decoration for a kitchen. "Well," said Morris, "to begin with, I think a flitch of bacon is a very good decoration for a kitchen."

About the time when the disposal of the Laureateship was being discussed, his contribution to the discussion was a suggestion that the most suitable person was the Marquis of Lorne (now the Duke of Argyll)—the point of the joke being (I trust I shall be pardoned by those who know the point of the joke) that the Marquis, besides being within the royal circle, writes occasional mediocre rhymes, and has done the Psalms into indifferent Scottish verse.

The introduction to "A Dream of John Ball" would of itself be enough to redeem Morris from the imputation of lacking humour. Describing how he fell a-dreaming, he says :—

I had begun my sojourn in the Land of Nod by a very confused attempt to conclude that it was all right for me to have an engagement to lecture at Manchester and Mitcham Fair Green at half-past eleven at night on one and the same Sunday, and that I could manage pretty well. And then I had gone on to try to make the best of addressing a large open-air audience in the costume I was then really wearing—to wit my nightshirt, reinforced for the dream occa-

sion by a pair of braceless trousers. The conciousness of this fact so bothered me that the earnest faces of my audience—who would *not* notice it, but were clearly preparing terrible anti-Socialistic posers for me—began to fade away, and my dream grew thin, and I awoke (as I thought) to find myself lying on a strip of wayside waste by an oak copse just outside a country village.

If Morris did not actually dream that dream (in the night), it is at any rate quite the kind of dream we could imagine him having.

If wit consists in the association of things apparently incongruous but really related, Morris's conversation was always witty. I once heard him describe a young Socialist agitator, remarkable for audacity and instability, as having "less chin and more cheek than any man in the movement." It so happened that the subject of this quip was really deficient in the feature usually associated with determination of character.

Morris's ebullitions of temper have been the subject of many stories, not less amusing for being sometimes obviously

apocryphal. I refrain from repeating any of these, partly because they have been told before, partly because they convey an erroneous impression of the man. Seeing the bearings of a question very readily himself, he was, nevertheless, impatient of stupidity only when it seemed to take the character of obstinacy. When I recall the things he bore with patience and often gracious good humour —guests, little attractive to him at best, long over-staying their welcome, people laying down the law to him on matters of which they knew little and he a great deal, the absurd speeches and bungling arrangements of associates, the prompt and hearty forgiveness he gave where a fault was admitted—I cannot help thinking of Morris as good-natured rather than irascible; that, in fact, is and always has been my prevailing conception of him. He himself has said that all men of active habits are inclined to be short-tempered; but if he formulated that dictum with any idea of excusing himself, he might

have saved himself the trouble: he stood in no great need of it. He was certainly too big a man to be angered by the ordinary petty things of life.

When Morris did give way to anger the gale blew hard and high for a time, and the impression made by any manifestation of his displeasure was heightened by the powerful expression of his face, his leonine mane, and abundant grey beard. I cannot help thinking that the theory that Morris was short-tempered is largely due to the effect produced by a momentary outburst when contrasted with his habitual good nature. It would thus seem that what Morris suffers from is the "quality" rather than the "defect." And even the defect inclined to virtue's side. He was angered more readily by anything mean or cruel than by even a personal slight or affront. Under that form of provocation his language became scathingly but never malignantly passionate. From all displays of anger he recovered promptly, and did

penance handsomely for the manner of his protest, even if the circumstances in some measure warranted the outbreak.

His manner in replying to questioners and opponents at his lecture-meetings, I have heard described as "good old-fashioned bullying"; but any truth there might be in this characterisation would apply only to the earlier stages of his lecturing career, when most of those who went to his lectures were obstinately hostile and determined not to understand, and when the same questions and objections—usually stupid and paltry—would be put with wearisome iteration at meeting after meeting. He was an especial sufferer from popular misconception, as his ideas were novel even for a Socialist, while his matter was more suitable for reading than hearing. His lectures were usually read, save when he spoke out of doors, and were genuine pieces of literature, intended ultimately for publication.

Morris was not exactly popular as a lecturer. He was too self-conscious and

too susceptible to the influence of his surroundings to be that. The ideal orator is wrapt up in his subject: all audiences are alike to him: he is impervious to the effect of empty benches, a cold or badly-lighted room, and the quizzical smile of the knowing man in the front seat. Morris was none of these. His method of handling a subject was that of the desk rather than that of the platform. Not only were his ideas novel, but, considering the conditions under which he so often spoke—that is to say, to a changing crowd at a street corner—his style was a trifle profound. The average audience requires the picturesque rather than the pensively speculative. It must not be asked to take too much in an hour's hearing. Everything must be "profusely illustrated" and beaten out thin. But Morris's lectures, if read, were always well read; and in extempore speech, when strongly moved, especially by indignation or contempt, he would speak with a dignity and masculine force which I have

never heard equalled. On the whole, however, I should say that any success he won as a lecturer was due rather more to the fame of his name and the impressiveness of his person than to the intrinsic effects of his oratory.

Morris's whole career is a triumph for Materialism. Holding all religions in equal disregard, his life was nevertheless above reproach from any essential point of view. His John Ball speaks a kind of theologised Secularism, which, whether the "rascal hedge priest" ever spoke it or not, is as natural in his mouth as snow in winter. As regards religion, Morris was quite certainly agnostic, but he was as far as possible from feeling any hostility to religion. Apart from the poetry and wisdom of the sacred writings, it was the Church which had inspired the greatest triumphs in what was to him the greatest of the arts—to wit, architecture,

> The art where most magnificent appears
> The little builder man.

It was the Church which had preserved the ancient learning during the dark ages. It was the monks who had written the first leaved books, with their painted initials and illuminated borders, so grateful to the eye of the poet-craftsman. Music and painting, sculpture and carving were in his mind inseparably associated with the Church, which also represented a fellowship in which all were at least on a spiritual equality. The friar pervaded the whole atmosphere of that mediæval life which Morris found more interesting and attractive than the life of his own day. Pagan as he was, he always urged that it was to the clergy we owed such revival in architectural taste within the last half-century as had taken place.

Here was a man who, with money, health, and high spirits, began life with every temptation, according to the current theory of Materialism, to take his ease, to eat, drink, and be merry. Instead, however, of spending his life and

fortune in sensual self-indulgence, he appears to us as a man of restless energy in the pursuit of literature and art in its higher sphere, of art as applied to the common things of life, and last of all, and perhaps best of all, the pursuit of social science and the advocacy of equality, social harmony, and joy and dignity in all the vocations of life. The uprightness and high social serviceableness of Morris's career were, of course, not due to his Materialism: they were due to his nature, to his early environment in quiet, classic Oxford, with the companions he found there, and doubtless in no small degree to the unnoted but always potent influences of the chapter of accidents. But if Morris's career was not shaped and determined by his opinions as to the origin and government of the universe, it at least showed that a man is not bound to become a cynic and low pleasure-seeker because he does not believe in Providence and the immortality of the soul.

We find Morris the young man turning to literature, but refusing to regard that as more than a rather better sort of recreation, and refusing to confine his energies to a calling which he did not need to follow for a livelihood. He is attracted by the arts; but with his catholicity and strong tendency towards the practical, he could not be satisfied with the Art which painted fine pictures and moulded fine statues, while leaving the common things of life ugly as to form and spurious as to material. Pursuing literature and the minor arts, he came at length to realise that, with social and economic conditions remaining as they were, art and literature and life could never be what they were capable of becoming in a free society; and, just as he had striven to perfect the arts, so, now that he had made this discovery, he proceeded to engage himself in the work of preparing society for the diffusion of them.

That through all this he should have been a good husband and father, a clean

liver, and a just and kindly employer, is one more proof that a man can be a genius and a revolutionist without being a crank or a person whose grave moral defects are overlooked only on account of his abilities.

The last time I saw Morris was in "the borough beautiful" whose other name is "outcast Salford," now over seven years ago. He was speaking from a lorry pitched on a piece of waste land close to the Ship Canal, his whole environment probably as distasteful to him as possible. It was a wild March morning, and he would not have been asked to speak out of doors, but he had expressed a desire to do so; and so there he was, talking quietly but strenuously, drawing a laugh every now and then by some piece of waggish wisdom from the undulating crowd, of working men mostly, who stood in the hollow and on the slopes before him. There would be quite two thousand of them. He wore the well-known blue overcoat, but had

laid aside his hat, and his grizzled hair blew in wisps and tumbles about his face. As he stood there squarely upright, his sturdy figure clothed in blue, even to the shirt with turndown collar, and swaying slightly from side to side as he hammered out his points, he looked a man and a gentleman every inch of him.

There was about Morris's person a very distinct individuality. He has been compared to one of his own Berserkers; but I am not sure that any of us has a very clear idea of what a Berserker was like. The massive, shaggy head, the face strong and well-coloured, and the sailor-like roll of the body suggested a skipper ashore while his cargo was being discharged; but then no skipper ever wore an Inverness cloak, or broad-brimmed felt hat, or carried a thick stick, or slung a brown canvas bag over his head containing among much else an armoury of pipes, which he would lend to any member of the company who had left his pipe at home. He had somewhat

the look of those patriarchal shepherds who come down from the Highlands, driving their flocks before them through the cities of the plain, and uttering marvels of articulation to their dogs. But shepherds do not wear blue serge, nor have they the air and gait of this man. In short, it was as difficult to match Morris outwardly as it was to find the exact peer of him intellectually and morally.

Morris has been compared to Johnson in that he was not conspicuously clean in his person. He was certainly unconventional in his dress; but so far as I know, the only foundation for the charge of untidiness in his person was that his blue clothes were sometimes well worn before he discarded them; that he did not wear starched linen; that he wore his hair and beard long; and that he liked to sleep with a blanket next him in preference to a sheet. A man who is alternately at work in the dye-vat, the printing office, or with brushes, colours, and Indian

ink as a designer, can hardly be expected to dress and look like the spick-and-span *petit maitre.* To say that Morris was untidy because his hands were sometimes soiled with the elements he worked in is the criticism of a shopwalker.

But to return to the last time I saw him. As I sat and shivered, along with a number of others, at the end of the form placed on the lorry, the artist of an illustrated paper handed me up a note asking me to persuade Morris to pose for him. The lecture was over and the chairman was speaking by this time. "Oh, no; he must just take his chance," was the reply, given in a sort of husky falsetto tone which sometimes came into Morris's voice after a long speech. The newspaper artist got his sketch, however, and this meeting was further celebrated by a local poet in *his* way. In spite of the bitter cold of the morning, scarcely a man moved from the crowd; though there was comparatively little fire or fervour in the speech, and next to no allusion to any

special topic of the hour. Many there were hearing and seeing the man for the first time; most of us were hearing him for the last time; and we all looked and listened as though we knew it.

"Our stainless Bayard" sleeps soundly in that quiet rural churchyard of Lechdale to which he was fittingly carried by farm labourers on a bough-strewn bier. His work is not yet done; for he being dead yet speaketh; and though his fame is less than that of many to whom the world owed not so much, his day is surely coming. Good work in the fields he cultivated is not so plentiful that the world can long overlook his contributions to the sum of civilisation.

[THE END.]

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